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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SKOPJE 000038

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM MK

SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: AMBASSADOR WARNS FOREIGN MINISTER ON NATIONALISM AND PROVOKING GREECE

Classified By: DCM NAVRATIL FOR REASONS 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: We have been engaging at all levels of the GoM regarding Macedonia's decision to name a stadium, highway, and new cargo airport for Alexander the Great and Philip of Macedon and its plans to erect yet more Alexander statues in Skopje and elsewhere. In a Jan. 16 meeting with FonMin Milososki (and others with PM Gruevski, reported elsewhere), Ambassador noted our frustration with these obvious provocations of Greece when it is more important than ever to solve the name dispute. (We learned Jan. 22 that the GoM has backed off plans to erect a massive Alexander statue in Skopje until at least 2011.) Ambassador also noted our concerns about ultra-nationalistic, even racist messages on state television. Milososki expressed concern that Greece would somehow work to sabotage elections in March. He candidly described his doubts about the ruling VMRO's presidential election strategy. He also agreed to engage more with NATO and work to complete demarcation of the Kosovo border. End summary.

More Alexander Statues, Airports, Roads?

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¶2. (SBU) According to recent press reports -- later confirmed to us by GoM leaders -- Macedonia will rename the Skopje City Stadium after Philip II of Macedon (as well as a cargo airport planned for Stip) and the Corridor 10 highway (which runs to the Greek border crossing near Thessaloniki) after Alexander the Great. We have also learned that the government was planning to fund an enormous project in downtown Skopje, to include a 70-foot statue of Alexander in a massive fountain in Skopje's central city square. The entire project is estimated at nine million Euros and will include a musical component that will play perpetually from the fountain as well as five other statues which will be erected around Skopje's Stone Bridge, including one of Philip of Macedon and four of other historical characters not related to the name dispute.

¶3. (C) The GOM had appeared determined to move forward with these plans despite stern reprimands from the international community after renaming Skopje's airport after Alexander in 2007 and our strong urging to not move forward with these new plans since their revelation. In response to emphatic advice from the Ambassador in their Jan. 16 meeting that such actions were extraordinarily unhelpful and threatened to alienate proponents of Macedonia in Washington, FonMin Milososki initially defended these actions as a means to defend Macedonia's identity against Greek provocations, but he ultimately backpedaled from that stance, hinting at the frustrations he faces trying to run diplomacy in the face of such decisions by his superiors (i.e., Gruevski). However, Gruevski himself promised an Embassy staff member Jan. 22 that the GoM will not proceed with the Skopje statue project until at least 2011.

## Ugly Historicism

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¶4. (C) The Ambassador also raised in separate meetings with Gruevski and Milososki a bizarre and racist New Year's address featured in Macedonian state television's short film &God's Prayer.<sup>8</sup> The message included the passage: &Know that I have inhabited your mother earth with three races: Macedonoid (Caucasoid), Mongloid, and Negroid. The rest are a mixed breed. From you Macedonians I created and spread the white race up to the Japanese Sea.<sup>8</sup> While Milososki and Gruevski were unfamiliar with the broadcast, the PM's Chief of Staff, Martin Protopger, termed it &pure fascism<sup>8</sup> and said he had undertaken actions to investigate and dismiss those responsible.

## Milososki on Elections: A Greek Plot?

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¶5. (C) Milososki expressed concerns about Greece chairing the OSCE and the possibility that Greece could somehow use its position to sabotage March elections, cautioning that it only takes a few people to create problems. (As usual, ODIHR will carry out a significant monitoring mission.) He also noted rumors that the e-Albanian opposition party DPA may look for an excuse to boycott the elections to avoid the embarrassment of their probable widespread municipal defeat. Milososki said candidly that he felt a non-VMRO president would &be good for the Party, and good for the country,<sup>8</sup> hinting that he would have preferred it if VMRO would back Srgjan Kerim for the position.

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## NATO Participation, the ICJ Case and Border Demarcation

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¶6. (C) Milososki agreed that Macedonia should increase its engagement with NATO even given the disappointment at Bucharest, and said he and DefMin Konjanovski plan to go to Brussels to meet with the Secretary General and Ambassador Volker. (We understand this visit is now scheduled for Feb. 12.) The FonMin expects that there will be little visible activity in the International Court of Justice case against Greece over the next few months as both countries make requests and counter-requests over the time necessary to prepare written briefs and then actually settle into preparing arguments. Milososki expressed a strong desire to finish the border demarcation soon in order to establish diplomatic relations with Kosovo and begin implementing projects that are currently in the works. He seemed optimistic that the demarcation could be completed in early February.

NAVRATIL